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# MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

*TITLE: Joint Operations at Vicksburg: The Decisive Force*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** Joint Operations at Vicksburg: The Decisive Force

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**Thesis:** In July 1863, the city of Vicksburg surrendered to Union forces. The Union Army and Navy conducted joint operations and this was the decisive factor in their victory. Strong leadership and effective communications enabled the two services to work in concert to achieve their objective.

**Discussion:** I selected six factors to evaluate the Vicksburg campaign: leadership, communication, synergy, balance, agility and coordination. Of these, leadership and communications had the greatest impact and facilitated good coordination between the land and naval forces. By maintaining a higher tempo and conducting simultaneous attacks, the Union Army and Navy created a synergistic effect that overwhelmed the Confederate forces. Agility helped the Union leadership locate and attack seams in the Confederate defenses and maintain a balanced force, which consistently pressed the attack.

Early battles in the western theatre prepared the Union leaders for joint operations at Vicksburg. Strong and trusting relationships grew between army and navy commanders and overcame service parochialism. Mutual support between the services enhanced force protection, fire support, intelligence and agility. Communications enhanced the effectiveness in both the planning and execution of the campaign. Finally, strong leadership encouraged mutual support and cultivated an *esprit de corps*, which enhanced the joint operations.

**Conclusion:** Successful joint operations whether conducted in the nineteenth or twenty-first century will depend upon good leadership, effective communications, synergy, balance, agility, and coordination. The Union leadership's ability to incorporate these principles during the Vicksburg campaign was key to their success.

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## *Preface*

Studying the approaches and strategies used by military leadership during times of war is useful for future leaders. In earlier times, the services fought separately and for different objectives. The armies fought one another on land and the navies battled on the seas. Over time, the concept of synchronizing the forces developed on an ad hoc basis among military leaders with mutual objectives. The joint operations conducted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century do not resemble those employed by today's military forces. Nevertheless, these early joint operation efforts set the stage for future coordination and cooperation among the forces. This paper analyzes the extent and results of the joint operations developed and implemented by the Union leadership during the Civil War and, in particular, their use at Vicksburg.

Union forces successfully captured the city of Vicksburg in 1863. The mutual support the Union Army and Navy gave one another as well as the cooperation cultivated by the senior commanders in theatre played a vital role in this victory. To assess the successful collaboration between the Union's forces, a clear definition of joint operations must be established.

This paper uses six rudiments of successful joint operations: leadership, communications, synergy, balance, agility and coordination to evaluate the Vicksburg campaign. Of these, I found leadership and communications to be the two most important elements. The personalities of the Union leadership, their cooperative spirit, and their ability to communicate effectively, allowed for good coordination, synergy, agility and balance. Today's military leaders, like the Union leadership of the 1860s, still require these elements in executing successful joint operations.

I would like to thank several people who helped me complete this project. First and foremost my wife Holly, who patiently read through numerous drafts and served as my chief editor. I could not have done it without her moral support and encouragement. Invaluable suggestions from my sister Charrie, also improved the overall flow and clarity of the paper. Additionally, I'd like to thank my mentors, Dr. Richard Dinardo and Lieutenant Colonel Chuck Hudson, USMC, for their guidance. In closing, I dedicate this work to the loving memory of my father, John W. Hazard, Sr. A great man who led by example and cared for those entrusted to him by God.

## Chapter 1

### Joint Operations and Military Success

*Strategy is the most important  
department of the art of war, and  
strategical skill is the highest and rarest  
function of military genius*

*George S. Hillard*

The joint operations employed in the Civil War provide valuable lessons to all military leaders involved in planning and executing future campaigns. In a primary book on joint operations, Rowena Reed concludes that the operations conducted by the Union Army and Navy throughout the Civil War do not qualify as joint operations. She argues that these operations were simply conducted on an ad hoc, sporadic basis and were ineffective.<sup>1</sup> Ample evidence exists, however, to suggest that the principles of Joint Operations, as defined by the Joint Officer's Staff Guide, were employed. Indeed, detailed analysis using the Guide's principles indicates that decisive joint operations were essential to the victory achieved by the Union forces at Vicksburg.

The framework for my analysis comprises six key factors. In my experience, the primary and essential factors required to conduct successful joint operations are leadership and communication. The last four factors, synergy, balance, agility and coordination come from the Joint Staff Officer's Guide and are considered facets of the operational art of war, necessary for successful campaign planning. This paper examines

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<sup>1</sup> Rowena Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1978), p. 260.

the campaign of Vicksburg through this prism to determine whether decisive joint operations were key to the Union victory.

Just because the Union Army and Navy worked together in this campaign does not, in and of itself, mean they conducted joint operations. This is clear in the Joint Pub 1-02, where “Joint Operations” are defined as, “military actions conducted by joint forces, or by Service forces in relationships (e.g., support, coordinating authority), which, of themselves, do not create joint forces.”<sup>2</sup> The emphasis here is cooperation and coordination. Although this definition is helpful to frame a discussion of joint operations, it fails to set forth the factors necessary for evaluating the success or failure of joint operations. While acknowledging there are a multitude of reasons for operational success, the most critical of these factors are: leadership, communications, synergy, balance, agility and coordination. Forces employing these rudiments can be confident in their ability to conduct successful joint operations.

## **Rudiments of Successful Joint Operations**

### *Leadership*

Joint operations are complex. One essential ingredient in executing them properly is strong leadership. Strong leadership develops and cultivates a spirit of cooperation among the separate services joining forces. It sets aside parochial interests in favor of the higher objective of victory. It allows exploration of different possibilities and the free exchange of ideas. It inspires professionals to set the military’s overall objective of victory above their own personal interests and to work with their fellow commanders in

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<sup>2</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 1-02. *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC:GPO, 12 April 2001), p. 227. (Hereafter cited as Joint Pub 1-02.)

unison. It encourages subordinates to take initiative when opportunities arise. Skillful leadership is therefore a critical part of conducting successful joint operations.

### *Communications*

Good communications are indispensable to effective joint operations. This is true for communications both within an individual force as well as between forces. Good communications allow commanders to control the forces at their disposal and to maintain the operational picture and situational awareness. To achieve this, communications must flow both up and down the chain of command. Good communications are timely and allow the war fighter to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Finally, communications must be clear and concise, otherwise confusion and friction will create problems.

### *Synergy*

Synergy is the combination of two forces, such as a land and a sea force, which together generate power greater than the sum of the individual forces. It maximizes the strengths of the forces and minimizes their weaknesses. The synchronized forces create multiple, simultaneous problems for the enemy while limiting his possible responses. This can give a military the decisive edge in battle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, JFCS Pub 1. *The Joint Staff Officer's Guide 2000*. (Norfolk: JFSC, 2000), p. 3-20. (Hereafter cited as JFCS Pub 1.)

### *Balance*

Balance in the maintenance and mix of forces is key to successful joint operations. To be effective, forces need proper supplies and equipment. Shortages in these areas shackle the military and jeopardize the mission. Moreover, supplies and equipment must arrive on scene at the correct time or else synchronized plans will be negatively affected.

### *Agility*

Agility is the ability to move forces quickly to the critical point, before the enemy has time to effectively react. Agile forces provide the warfighter an advantage over his adversary, and increase his ability to surprise the enemy. Agile forces also improve the ability to re-enforce weak points at a critical moment on the battlefield. Finally, agility keeps an adversary off balance because he is not sure where or when forces will strike.

### *Coordination*

Because joint operations are so complex, coordination is vital. Specific qualities already mentioned, especially leadership and communications, are essential in coordination. When officers employ good coordination, all forces are on the same page of the playbook and their actions have a unified purpose. Good coordination is not rigid but allows for flexibility in the execution of the overall plan. It allows commanders to take the initiative, but at the same time, keeps the friendly forces informed, so that all can act appropriately to meet the designated goal.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> JFCS Pub 1, p. 3-15 – 3-22.

## **Joint Operations Exhibited at Vicksburg**

The above characteristics were present in the Union forces that attacked and defeated the Confederate Army at Vicksburg. The senior leadership saw the advantage and necessity of working together in order to achieve victory. The Union Army and Navy commanders pulled together to overcome parochial attitudes that, in many instances, created friction. They maintained communications through several different means, including the use of innovations such as the telegraph and Colonel Myer's system of signaling, which helped the Union leadership exchange ideas and coordinate their operations.

The Union forces created synergy on several different occasions during the campaign when the navy and army conducted simultaneous assaults against fortified positions. The commanders balanced the force through cooperation in logistical support and transportation. By maintaining "control" of the Mississippi and using gunboats to support troop transports, the Union forces were more agile than the Confederate forces. General Grant's ability to move three corps of his army across the Mississippi, from Hard Times Landing to Bruinsburg, is a clear illustration. This was the largest amphibious operation in the nation's history and the turning point of the campaign.

Finally, coordination fostered by the senior leadership of both services helped achieve victory. Senior leadership expected subordinate commanders to embrace a spirit of cooperation to ensure coordination at the tactical level. With each of these ingredients present, the Vicksburg campaign was successful. Had they not been present, the successful outcome of the Vicksburg campaign would have been in question.

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## **Chapter 2**

### **EARLY BATTLES PREPARE FORCES FOR JOINT OPERATIONS AT VICKSBURG**

Both Union Army and Navy Commanders gained an appreciation of the advantages in coordinating their forces and efforts in the western theatre. Early in the conflict, General Grant gained valuable insight into the heightened potential of the army and navy when operating in conjunction. He believed in the excellent support that the navy could provide the army. This included naval gunfire cover for landing forces, troop escorts, transportation of supplies, interdiction of the enemy's lines of communication and reconnaissance. Shortly after assuming command of Headquarters District Southeast Missouri, Grant made use of the gunboats. His effective employment of them ensured his early successes in the key state of Kentucky.

Likewise, Captain Andrew Hull Foote, U.S. Navy, used army manpower and resources. In particular, Foote used the army to help man his gunboats. The army also provided him fire support during their joint ventures. The army's cooperation helped his squadron of gunboats to capture Confederate forts, steamboats and supplies, and disrupt the Confederate lines of communication operating in theater.

#### **Union Leadership Learns the Utility of Joint Operations**

Kentucky, an important border state in 1861, was on the fence as to which side it would support in the struggle between the states. The Governor of Kentucky initially claimed neutrality. But, "[i]n early September of 1861 Confederate forces seized Hickman and Columbus Kentucky. This action swayed the Governor to the Union



side.”<sup>5</sup> When Grant received intelligence that a Confederate force was moving from Columbus to take the key city of Paducah, at the mouth of the Tennessee River, he put his forces in motion. “With approximately 1,800 men embarked on three steamboats and escorted by the gunboats *Tyler* and *Conestoga*, he left Cairo and was able to force the Confederates to retreat from Paducah, and then occupy that stronghold for the Union.”<sup>6</sup> Although no shots were fired taking the city, the action provided an important lesson: gunboats could provide protection for troop transports and ensure their agility. In a dispatch to Headquarters District Southeast Missouri on 6 September 1861, Grant writes, “I left two gunboats and one of the steamboats at Paducah, placed the post under command of General E.A. Paine, and left Paducah at 12 o’clock, arriving at this port at 4 this afternoon.”<sup>7</sup> Employing gunboats in support of his operations became a recurring tactic in Grant’s future operations.

### **Intelligence Operations**

On 22 September 1861, the gunboats *Tyler* and *Lexington* assisted Grant in determining the location of the enemy in the vicinity of Columbus, Kentucky. Reporting to General Fremont, Grant writes,

Yesterday I directed a reconnaissance in force to discover the position of the enemy. The main part of the troops from Norfolk and Fort Jefferson were landed below Island No. 1, and marched from there down the beach road, supported by the gunboats *Tyler* and *Lexington*. The results proved the

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<sup>5</sup> Ivan Musicant, *Divided Waters* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2000), p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> United States War Dept., *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1888-1902) Series 1, IV, p. 196. (Hereafter cited as *OR*. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are from Series 1.)

<sup>7</sup> *OR*, IV, p. 197.

Confederates to be in and around Columbus. No outposts are occupied by them nearer to us.<sup>8</sup>

Grant effectively used gunboats to support his troops in the reconnaissance mission. Here the coordinated effort reaped valuable intelligence for the Union forces and enhanced their situational awareness.

### **Force Protection with Fire Support**

In the battle of Belmont, Grant again made effective use of his gunboats. General Fremont was pursuing Confederate General Sterling Price, who had a sizeable force operating in Missouri. To prevent General Sterling from being re-enforced from Columbus, Grant was ordered to make a demonstration against the Confederates there. On 6 November 1862, Grant with 3,000 troops convoyed by two gunboats proceeded down river.<sup>9</sup> When Grant received intelligence that Confederate troops were ferrying over to the Missouri side of the Mississippi River to a small Confederate camp at Belmont, he decided to act.<sup>10</sup> Commander Henry Walke landed Grant's troops approximately three miles upstream of Belmont, then made several attacks against the Confederate batteries at Columbus. In his after action report to Grant, Walke writes, "At noon, hearing the continued firing at Belmont, our two gunboats made their third attack upon the enemy's batteries, this time going nearly a quarter of a mile nearer."<sup>11</sup> Walke's

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<sup>8</sup> *OR*, IV, p. 199-200.

<sup>9</sup> General Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (Hartford, CT: C.L. Webster, 1885), p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> *OR*, III, p. 269-270.

<sup>11</sup> *OR*, III, p. 276.

gunboats also covered Grant's withdrawal from the battle and his sailors assisted in caring for the wounded.<sup>12</sup>

This engagement accomplished two important goals for the Union forces. First, it prevented the Confederate forces at Columbus from supporting General Price. Second, it gave Grant's subordinate commanders a good lesson on how gunboats could provide effective fire support for them. The after action report from Colonel John Logan, commanding the Thirty First Regiment Illinois Volunteers, specifically praises the covering fire his troops enjoyed during his withdrawal to the waiting steamboats.<sup>13</sup> The battle was not without incident, as reported by Colonel Buford to his brigade commander, Brigadier General John A. McClernand. "We marched northward in rear of the farms on Lucas Bend, a distance of about 3 miles, before returning to the river near sunset, exposed during the whole march to the shot and shell of our own gunboats, which happily did us no injury."<sup>14</sup>

Despite mistakes, the overall operation was a success for the Union forces. Grant's after action report confirms the effective role the gunboats played in the operation noting, "The gunboats *Tyler*, Captain Walke and *Lexington*, Captain Stembel, convoyed the expedition, and rendered most efficient service. Immediately upon our landing, they engaged the enemy's batteries on the heights above Columbus, and protected our transports throughout."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *OR, III*, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup> *OR, III*, p. 289.

<sup>14</sup> *OR, III*, p. 285.

<sup>15</sup> *OR, III*, p. 271.

## Cooperative Leadership

The reduction of Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee was next on the agenda for the Union forces. In moving against these forts, the army and navy aimed to push south the Confederate line, running from Columbus to Bowling Green, Kentucky. This would expel the Confederate forces from Kentucky and rob them of valuable railheads. General McClellan ordered General Halleck to conduct a feint to prevent Confederate reinforcement against Brigadier Carlos Buell, who was preparing to assault the rebel forces at Bowling Green.<sup>16</sup> Grant used this order to press General Halleck for permission to attack Fort Henry.<sup>17</sup> Situated on the Tennessee River, Fort Henry was considered valuable because, in Union hands, it would allow access deep into Alabama, enabling Union forces to interdict Confederate lines of communications. In this particular instance, Flag Officer Foote helped General Grant convince General Halleck of the importance of joint operations to take Fort Henry.<sup>18</sup> With both officers sending dispatches to him requesting permission to pursue the operation, General Halleck finally acquiesced.<sup>19</sup> Here we see a unity of purpose and effort among the commanders of the Union Army and Navy.

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<sup>16</sup> *OR*, VII, p. 527-528.

<sup>17</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 169.

<sup>18</sup> *OR*, VII, p. 120. A dispatch from Foote to Halleck states, he and Grant wish to work in concert to take Fort Henry.

<sup>19</sup> *OR*, VII, p. 121. A dispatch from Halleck to Grant orders the joint assault on Fort Henry.

## **Agility and Speed**

The attack on Fort Henry was planned as a simultaneous assault. However, due to adverse weather, the brigade commanded by General Smith, one of Grant's subordinates, could not reach Fort Henry at the same time as the gunboats. The Confederates had decided against making a stand at Fort Henry and instead left a rearguard there to fight a delaying action. Meanwhile, the remaining contingent retreated to Fort Donelson to make its stand. The Union gunboats assaulted the Fort on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February.<sup>20</sup> Their superior firepower overcame Confederate forces before Grant's troops arrived on scene. In fact, General Tilghman, who commanded the Confederate forces holding the fort, went via small boat to surrender to Flag Officer Foote.<sup>21</sup>

When Grant did arrive, he asked Foote to dispatch a gunboat up the Tennessee River to reconnoiter and to disrupt Confederate lines of communication. Lieutenant Phelps, leading three gunboats, wrought havoc on the rebels by destroying the Railroad Bridge, which connected Bowling Green and Nashville to the Mississippi. He also captured and destroyed several Confederate vessels and gathered vital intelligence.<sup>22</sup>

## **Union Leadership Identifies Vulnerabilities**

With the fall of Fort Henry, the next objective was Fort Donelson. The ground at Fort Donelson was more favorable as a defensive position than that of Fort Henry. High bluffs for gun emplacements along the Cumberland allowed the Confederate gunners to

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<sup>20</sup> Admiral David D. Porter, USN, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (Secaucus, NJ: Castle, 1984), p. 142-43.

<sup>21</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*, p. 149-150.

deliver plunging shots at the Union gunboats. Union forces would face a similar topographical problem, impeding their maneuverability, at Vicksburg.

### **Assault on Fort Donelson**

As Grant writes of the Fort Donelson operation, "The plan was for the troops to hold the enemy within his lines, while the gunboats should attack the water batteries at close quarters and silence his guns if possible."<sup>23</sup> While some of the gunboats attacked the fort, others landed troops south of Dover on the Confederate left flank.

"At three o'clock, 14 February 1862, Foote's squadron commenced a heavy bombardment of Fort Donelson."<sup>24</sup> The positional advantage of the batteries at the fort became immediately apparent as the Union gunboats suffered numerous hits. One by one, the gunboats fell back down the river damaged and, in some cases, totally disabled. This was a serious set back for Foote's gunboat squadron but was not the end of their participation in the battle to capture Fort Donelson. In fact, the gunboats *Saint Louis* and *Louisville* bombarded the fort just prior to the Confederate forces' capitulation.<sup>25</sup>

The following day, Foote invited Grant aboard his flagship to inform him of the time required to get his damaged gunboats repaired and back on station.<sup>26</sup> That same morning, the Confederates attempted a break out from Fort Donelson along the Union right. Grant rallied his forces to plug the line and then counter attacked. The evening of

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<sup>23</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 178.

<sup>24</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 199.

<sup>25</sup> Charles D. Gibson, *The Army's Navy Series Volume II, Assault and Logistics: Union Army Coastal and River Operations 1861-1866* (Camden Maine: Ensign Press, 1995), p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 179.

the 15<sup>th</sup>, the Confederates still held Fort Donelson but realized they could not prevail with the fort invested on the landside and the gunboats controlling the river.<sup>27</sup> The next morning, General Buckner sent terms of surrender to Grant; Grant immediately rejected them. The Union general wanted unconditional surrender and later that day General Buckner submitted.<sup>28</sup> In this battle, both Grant and Foote learned that the gunboats were vulnerable to plunging fire from batteries positioned high up on the hills. The fleet suffered severe damage, but the Union gained control of the river, essential to its victory. The gunboats' firepower helped seal the fate of the garrison at Fort Donelson. Major General Lewis highlights the role the gunboats played when he writes,

‘I recollect yet the positive pleasure the sounds [naval gunfire] gave me... the obstinacy and courage of the Commodore...’, when speaking of gunboat support he said ‘It distracted the enemy’s attention and I fully believe it was the gunboats ... that operated to prevent a general movement of rebels up the river or across it, the night of the surrender.’<sup>29</sup>

## **Lessons Learned**

These battles were instructional to the leadership of the Union Army and Navy. Grant saw firsthand how the gunboats could protect his troop transports, providing freedom of movement. This increase in agility proved to be a crucial factor in the campaign against Vicksburg. Grant also understood the firepower the gunboats possessed and how effectively he could use it to land or cover his army. In future operations, he leaned heavily on the gunboats to help provide logistical support and to

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<sup>27</sup> *OR, VII*, p. 264.

<sup>28</sup> *OR, VII*, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> Naval History Division , *Civil War Naval Chronology 1861 – 1865*,(Washington: Navy Department, 1971), p. II-22.

smash the Confederate lines of communication. The navy gunboats helped Grant gain and maintain an accurate operational picture of the situation by providing detailed, reliable intelligence to his army. All of these factors enabled Grant to recognize the importance of conducting joint operations and to calculate how to use them in future battles. Their employment could generate victory, even against such a formidable stronghold as Vicksburg.



## Chapter 3

### USE OF JOINT OPERATIONS AT VICKSBURG

A careful look at the map of Mississippi reveals Vicksburg to be a strategic location of great value. The city is on the Mississippi River and has the Southern Railroad running



through it. The Southern Railroad, which runs from west to east, connects to the Mississippi Central Railroad and the Mobile & Ohio Railroad, both of these lines run north and south. As a result of this, commerce and war supplies could be routed to practically every major city on the Southeastern seaboard and the Gulf coast. Thus, Vicksburg represented a critical artery for supplies that would be essential for the Confederate and its war effort. Even President Lincoln, who was

**Figure 1. Theater of operations in Mississippi<sup>30</sup>**

<sup>30</sup> Leonard Fullenkamp, Stephen Bowman, and Jay Luvaas, *Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 12.

not a military man, recognized the strategic importance of the city when he said. “Let us get Vicksburg and all that country is ours. The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.”<sup>31</sup>

The terrain of Vicksburg, however, posed a daunting challenge for the Union forces. The city is located on high ground above the Mississippi River, and was heavily fortified by the Confederates, commanded by General John C. Pemberton. Artillery pieces dotted the eastern bank of the Mississippi above and below the city making an assault from the sea extremely arduous. Likewise, the low lying terrain to the east favored the defender in an attack. Nevertheless, Generals Grant and Sherman and Admiral Porter coordinated their forces in a joint operation that eventually led to the city’s fall. Good communications and strong leadership played key roles in this campaign.

### **Overview of the Joint Campaign**

A campaign, as defined by Joint Pub 1-02, is, “...a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space.”<sup>32</sup> The joint campaign against Vicksburg breaks down into three phases. The first phase lasted from November 1862 to January 1863 and encompassed two joint operations, the battles of Chickasaw Bluff and Arkansas Post. The Union lost the first battle due to poor timing and communication, but won the second due to overwhelming power and synergy. The second phase ran from February to the end of April 1863 and

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<sup>31</sup> Michael B. Ballard, *The Campaign for Vicksburg, Civil War Series*, (Eastern National: 1996), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Joint Pub 1-02, p. 59.

entailed four joint expeditions to gain a positional advantage against the city followed by a brilliantly executed amphibious operation that included two feints. This successful operation was the turning point of the campaign. The final phase began in May and ended on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1863, when the Confederate forces surrendered.

### **First Phase of the Campaign**

The campaign began with General Sherman's plan to take Vicksburg through the coordinated efforts of two forces: his and Grant's army, situated north of Vicksburg, and Admiral Porter's gunboat fleet, supported by an army division, located west on the Yazoo River. Sherman explained the concept in a dispatch to Porter:

I think the forces now under Grant are able to handle anything in the Mississippi; and our men are confident and pretty well drilled. We can advance southward, striking Grenada and interposing between Vicksburg and Jackson, but your fleet should be abreast or ahead of the army. You invite these suggestions, and I think General Halleck would order a concert of action any time you are prepared. The possession of the river, with an army capable of disembarking and striking inland, would have a mighty influence {Synergy}.<sup>33</sup>

The plan culminated in the failed assault against Chickasaw Bluff primarily because Grant's army was engaged elsewhere and could not participate in the coordinated attack. Lacking a communication link, Grant could not convey his situation to Sherman and Porter. An alternative or branch plan was not incorporated into the overall operation,

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<sup>33</sup> *OR, XVII, Part III*, p. 867.

should one of the forces be delayed in their movement towards Vicksburg. As a result, synergy was not attained and the assault failed against a prepared defensive position.

Immediately following this defeat, Sherman, General McClernard and Porter combined forces to rout Arkansas Post, which was capable of reinforcing Vicksburg from the Union rear. The coordinated efforts of the gunboat fleet and the army quickly defeated the Confederate forces, eliminating their ability to disrupt future operations at Vicksburg.

### **Second Phase of the Campaign**

This second phase of the campaign began with a series of four expeditions. Their aim was two-fold: to gain positional advantage with respect to the Confederate batteries of Vicksburg and to attain freedom of passage on the Mississippi to enhance an assault on Vicksburg. The expeditions were Youngs Point, Lake Providence, Fort Pemberton, and Steele Bayou. Though each of these expeditions failed, they served a useful purpose. First, they allowed the army and navy to work together on a joint project, and this helped develop good relationships between the services. Second, they kept the troops active during a difficult winter, achieving Grant's stated goal, "...to divert the attention of the enemy, of my troops and of the public generally."<sup>34</sup>

During the winter months, a plan began evolving in Grant's mind.<sup>35</sup> He began contemplating an amphibious assault south of Vicksburg in order to take the city. His problem was getting enough gunboats and troop transports south of Vicksburg to conduct

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<sup>34</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 262-264.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 272.

the amphibious assault. He also needed to conceal his intentions from the enemy. He accomplished both tasks and landed his army on the eastside of the Mississippi at Bruinsburg. Porter divided his gunboat force, a portion convoyed the troop transports south of Vicksburg under the cover of darkness. The remainder stayed with Sherman for a planned feint. In addition to these actions, Grant ordered Colonel Benjamin Grierson to conduct a Calvary raid to sow confusion in Pemberton's mind. Excellent leadership, coordination and communication enabled this operation to be successful.

### **Third Phase of the Campaign**

In the final stage of the campaign, Grant's corps initially drove Pemberton's forces to the northeast towards Jackson. In the original plan, Grant would join forces with General Bank's army to the south, then proceed against either Vicksburg or Port Hudson. Poor communications prevented execution of this plan. Grant saw a great opportunity to press the attack against Pemberton's army, so he drove towards Jackson. His goal was two-fold, to gain the Southern Railroad, a key supply line for the Confederates, and to prevent Johnston from reinforcing Pemberton. This strategy worked. Johnston retired from Jackson enabling Grant to turn his forces on Pemberton and drive them west towards Vicksburg. At this point, Grant with the cooperation and mutual support of the navy effectively sealed off the city.

### **Quality Leadership and Relationships between Commanders**

The strong personal relationships developed between the key army and navy commanders are one of the most striking aspects of the joint operations conducted at

Vicksburg. Grant, in particular, was gifted with patience and could work well with the other commanders. He was a good judge of character and competence. He could make the difficult decisions even when his fellow commanders did not necessarily agree with his course of action and still garner their support. His relationship with Porter was especially critical in the taking of Vicksburg.

### **Battle of Chickasaw Bluff**

Ivan Musicant describes the initial meeting between Grant and Porter to discuss a joint plan to seize Vicksburg prior to the Battle of Chickasaw Bluff.

He had his first opportunity to meet Admiral Porter on December 1, 1862 in order to discuss a joint operation against General Pemberton, the Confederate General commanding the forces in and around Vicksburg. The original plan, conceived by General Sherman, called for Admiral Porter to land a division up the Yazoo River at the foot of Chickasaw bluff. Simultaneously, Grant and Sherman would move south from Holly Springs along the Mississippi Central Railroad. This joint movement would place Pemberton's army in between two forces. Grant and Sherman would be to the east, on axis with the railroad and Porter's gunboats plus a division would be on the Yazoo River to the west.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly Grant, Sherman, and Porter were thinking about and planning joint operations. Grant decided to accelerate the timetable of the operations when news arrived that General McClernard received a presidential commission and would be coming into theater. Grant, Sherman and Porter anticipated trouble because McClernard was not a professional soldier but a politician.

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<sup>36</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 261. In Musicant's account, he refers to the two forces mentioned as the arms of a nutcracker and Vicksburg being the nut.

The change in plans resulted in Sherman's Corps embarking on transports at Memphis on 14 December 1862. Two days earlier, mine sweepers supported by gunboats started to clear mines and conduct a reconnaissance up the Yazoo River in preparation for the joint assault on Chickasaw Bluff.<sup>37</sup>

The dispatch Sherman sent to his Division Commanders on 23 December 1862, testified to his strong advocacy of joint operations.

Complete military success can only be accomplished by an united action on some general plan embracing usually a large district of country. In the present instance our object is to secure the navigation of the Mississippi River and its main branches, and to hold them as military channels of communication and commercial purposes...General Grant with the Thirteenth Corps, of which we compose the right wing, is moving southward. The naval squadron, Admiral Porter, is operating with his fleet by water, each in perfect harmony with the other...Parts of this general plan are to cooperate with the naval squadron in the reduction of Vicksburg, to secure possession of the land lying between the Yazoo and the Black and to act in concert with General Grant against Pemberton's forces, supposed to have Jackson, Miss., as a point of concentration...The gunboats under Admiral Porter will do their full share, and I feel assured that the army will not fall short in its work.<sup>38</sup>

Admiral Porter escorted Sherman's forces down the Mississippi to Milliken's Bend, arriving on Christmas Eve. Unbeknownst to them, a Confederate raiding party, led by Earl Van Dorn, had captured Grant's supply depot at Holly Springs. Coupled with this, the Confederates employing the cavalry of Nathan Bedford Forrest, launched another assault against Grant's supply lines. This attack cut off any supplies Grant might

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<sup>37</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 262-263.

<sup>38</sup> *OR, XVII, Part I*, p. 616-617.

obtain via the Mississippi. These events forced him to abandon his participation in the joint operations at Chickasaw Bluff in order to pursue Earl Van Dorn.

Sherman and Porter knew nothing of these attacks on Grant's forces because the Confederates also cut the telegraph lines and torn up much of the railroad track, which prevented Grant from communicating his situation to them. They assumed Grant was still moving towards Vicksburg as they advanced up the Yazoo River to commence the assault. The approaches to the Confederate positions were narrow due to flooding caused by heavy rains. This forced Porter to proceed further up river to Drumgould's Bluff to land Sherman's troops.

The assault began on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December. By that time Pemberton had reinforced his positions at Chickasaw Bluff. As Sherman's troops assaulted the bluffs, Porter's gunboats fired into the ends of the Union lines. The gunboat assault proved ineffective because the boats were firing from their maximum range. Heavy fire from the Confederate batteries positioned on the bluffs forced them to stand off. The Confederate forces soundly repulsed Sherman's assault because of their positional advantage and because Pemberton had time to reinforce the garrison. At the end of the day, Sherman's Corps suffered heavy casualties.<sup>39</sup>

Although executed poorly, the plan developed by Sherman and agreed to by both Grant and Porter calling for a joint effort from both naval and land forces was a step in the right direction for executing joint operations. They had hoped to trap Pemberton's army between the two forces and crush it. The attack failed because communications and coordination were missing from their plan. As a result, the blow delivered by Sherman

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<sup>39</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 264.



and Porter lacked the synergistic effect originally planned. They now needed to apply the lessons they learned from this experience to their future operations.

One such lesson was the importance of communications among the different forces participating in the operation. Additionally, the Union failed to take full advantage of the inherent speed and agility of its forces. Sherman and Porter arrived late to the assault area, giving the Confederates valuable time to fortify their line. This fact alone could have been enough to turn the tide of the battle. As Porter noted in his official report to Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy,

The battle commenced early in the day on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and our troops, with heroism, went to the assault. One division succeeded in getting into the batteries on the hill, and drove the enemy out; but one of the two divisions that were to assault being behind time, the assault was unsuccessful.<sup>40</sup>

### **Union Forces Rebound**

Though the defeat at Chickasaw Bluff was a serious setback, Union leaders applied the lesson learned from the experience to their next joint operation aimed at the Confederate cavalry station known as Arkansas Post. Ivan Musicant describes the sequence of events after McClernard arrived at Milliken's Bend as follows.

On 2 January 1863, McClernard assumed command of Sherman's Corps. McClernard and Sherman visited Porter's flagship on 4 January to discuss the possibility of conducting a joint operation against Arkansas Post. Admiral Porter found McClernard's rude treatment of Sherman offensive. Initially, Porter insisted he would support the mission with only two gunboats if McClernard led it, but would lend his entire fleet to the effort if Sherman led it. Sherman smoothed the waters between Porter and McClernard so that by the end of their meeting all agreed on the necessity of the operation and that

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<sup>40</sup> *OR, XVII, Part III*, p. 886.

McClelland would command the land forces with Sherman commanding the lead corps.<sup>41</sup>

The joint forces departed Milliken's Bend in early January 1863, to reduce Arkansas Post and a nearby fortification known as Fort Hindman. The forces included fifty transports convoyed by thirteen warships.<sup>42</sup> The forces arrived late on 10 January and troops began to deploy along the perimeter of the enemy forces. "The main assault started at 1300 on 11 January with Porter's gunboats engaging the fort with cannon."<sup>43</sup> A half hour later the infantry attacked. Within five hours, the Confederates surrendered the Post. Sherman highlights the importance coordination played in the attack in his after action report to McClelland.

My orders were that as soon as the gunboats opened their fire all our batteries in position should commence firing and continue until I ordered 'cease firing,' when, after three minutes' cessation, the infantry columns of Steele and Stuart were to assault the enemy's line of rifle pits and defenses.

The gunboats opened about 1 p.m., and our field batteries at once commenced firing, directing their shots at the enemy's guns, his line of defenses, and most especially enfilading the road which led directly into the fort, and which road separated General Morgan's line of attack from mine.<sup>44</sup>

This important victory boosted the morale of the Union soldiers and sailors and gave them confidence in their capability and leadership. This cooperation would continue to strengthen the relations between the services. Despite the early disagreement

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<sup>41</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 265.

<sup>42</sup> Musicant, *Divided Waters*, p. 265.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth P. Williams, *Grant Rises in the West: From Iuka to Vicksburg, 1862 - 1863* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1956), 297-298. Sherman explains to his brother, in a letter, how helpful the gunboats were to the army in this assault.

<sup>44</sup> United States Department of the Navy, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington DC: GPO, 1911), XXIV, p. 126. (Hereafter "ORN".)

between Porter and McClernard, the two forces were able to work well together.

Certainly Sherman forged a good relationship with Porter and this no doubt helped defuse the animosity between Porter and McClernard who had to work together.

As happens today, service rivalry evidenced itself in the different after action reports. For example, the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, complained in a dispatch to Porter shortly after the battle that the army had beaten him to the punch by reporting the victory ahead of the navy. Welles' frustration comes through in a diary entry he made on 19 January 1863 when he complains "Received a telegraphic dispatch from Admiral Porter via Cairo of the capture of Dunnington and the force at Arkansas Post. It is dated the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, -a long and protracted transit."<sup>45</sup> In reply, Porter promised the Navy Secretary he would report the good news ahead of the army next time.<sup>46</sup>

### **Trust and Cooperation build**

When Sherman, McClernard and Porter returned, Grant took overall command because of the difficult situation involving McClernand. The Union devoted the next several months to expeditions focused on gaining a positional advantage with respect to the high bluffs of Vicksburg. The army and navy worked together on the different expeditions mentioned earlier to close Confederate fortifications. The Steele Bayou expedition, in particular, helped garner a mutual respect between the forces and

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<sup>45</sup> Gideon D. Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*, (Howard K. Beale, ed.) (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1960), p. 224.

<sup>46</sup> *ORN XXIV*, p. 127.

developed a strong unity of purpose among the troops and sailors involved. Although the expedition ultimately failed, it achieved two important objectives. First, it forced Pemberton to extend his forces in order to meet this new threat, this meant weakening his line to protect Vicksburg. Second, it drew the two Union services closer together while destroying some of the enemy's key resources.

When the Confederates discovered Sherman and Porter were advancing via Steele's Bayou, to attack Vicksburg from the North, they dispatched Brigadier General Featherston's Brigade to check the joint force.<sup>47</sup> General Featherston requested reinforcements and supplies to press the attack as noted in his dispatch to Lieutenant General Pemberton on 22 March 1863, "We need boats, we need ammunition, and will need more men if they advance. We cannot pursue them well without more troops; our forces are worn out."<sup>48</sup> This expedition forced the Confederates to expend resources and strength they could ill afford.

At the same time, the Union army and navy developed stronger ties. Porter recognized this in his report to Gideon Welles on 26 March 1863, when he states, "Though nothing has resulted from it more than annoying the enemy and causing him to expend his resources, it has been of great service to the crews and given me an insight into the character of the commanders and officers of the expedition."<sup>49</sup> The navy's appreciation of Sherman's army comes through in a journal entry made by an officer on *Cincinnati* who writes, "At twenty-five minutes before 2 o'clock there is firing on both

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<sup>47</sup> *OR*, XXIV, Part I, p. 456.

<sup>48</sup> *OR*, XXIV, Part 1: p. 457.

<sup>49</sup> *ORN*, XXIV, p. 477.

sides, as General Sherman came up-and coming on board the *Cincinnati*, was received with three hearty cheers. The rebels have just been scattered by our fire and are running like frightened sheep.”<sup>50</sup> The strong bonds built during the expeditions helped Grant use both services for his next action, which would culminate in a major amphibious operation. Through their cooperation and coordination, Grant’s forces were able to outflank the over-extended Confederate line at Vicksburg. This enabled him to gain the crucial foothold he needed on the east bank of the Mississippi.

### **Coordinated Maneuver to Victory**

Grant considered a plan to move his forces to the south of Vicksburg on the west side of the Mississippi. With gunboat support, he could land his forces in the vicinity of Grand Gulf and then proceed north to invest the city. The navy would play a key role in this plan because Grant needed fire support and force protection for the troop transports. Grant explained, “The cooperation of the navy was absolutely essential to the success (even the contemplation) of such an enterprise.”<sup>51</sup> The first order of business was to get Admiral Porter’s fleet of gunboats and troop transports south of Vicksburg; this would require him to run the batteries along the east side of the Mississippi. According to Grant,

The navy was the only escort and protection for these steamers, all of which in getting below had to run about fourteen miles of batteries. Porter fell into the plan at once, and suggested that he had better superintend the preparation of the

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<sup>50</sup> *ORN*, XXIV, p. 495.

<sup>51</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 272.

steamers selected to run the batteries, as sailors would probably understand the work more better than soldiers.<sup>52</sup>

In preparing to run the batteries, Porter used bails of cotton, hay and grain to protect the boilers on his vessels. The troops needed the hay and grain. The lengthy supply line supporting the three divisions Grant ordered south required the troops to augment their provisions by living off the land. Here is a prime example of innovative planning and good cooperation between the army and navy. In order to confuse the Confederates as to the Union intentions, Grant directed Sherman to remain north of the city with his corps and eight gunboats. When Grant's main force moved against Grand Gulf, Sherman and his corps conducted a demonstration against Haynes Bluff.<sup>53</sup> Sherman described the diversion to Grant in a dispatch sent 1 May 1863.

Yesterday the new Choctaw, followed by all the other gunboats and our transports, approached the Bluff. We kept up a heavy fire, which was returned by the enemy. The Choctaw was struck fifty-three times, but her injuries are not in any vital parts.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to Sherman's diversion, Grant ordered Colonel Benjamin Grierson to conduct a cavalry raid against the Confederate forces. In his book *A Great Civil War*, Russell F. Weigley noted, "The raid also thoroughly achieved its objective of diverting Confederate attention . . . Both Grierson and Sherman provided feints while McClernard with the Thirteenth Corps and James B. McPherson with the Seventeenth Corps moved

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<sup>52</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 272.

<sup>53</sup> *OR*, XXIV, Part III, p. 245.

<sup>54</sup> *OR*, XXIV, Part I, p. 576.

down the west bank of the Mississippi to meet Porter.”<sup>55</sup> Grant’s ability to coordinate these efforts helped sow confusion in the mind of Pemberton.

On the evening of 16 April 1863, Porter and his fleet proceeded south on the Mississippi. They successfully ran the batteries of Vicksburg with the loss of only one transport, the *Henry Clay*. No one was killed and only a few were wounded.<sup>56</sup> Prior to the run, two corps of Grant’s army started to move south on the west bank of the Mississippi to New Carthage. The troops embarked the transports to cross the Mississippi for the assault on Grand Gulf. The initial assault by the gunboats revealed that the Confederates had fortified their positions well. However, Porter gained intelligence on the existence of a road south of Grand Gulf that would afford an unopposed landing for Grant’s troops. Porter sent a dispatch to Grant, dated 23 April, reporting the following:

Feeling that something was going on at Grand Gulf that should be stopped, I went down with the whole squadron to reconnoiter ... I found a preacher (half Union man), who was just from Grand Gulf. He told me all about the fortification and the number of troops ... They have 12,000 troops at Grand Gulf and still increasing the number... My idea was to attack the forts at once and land troops, for the position is a very strong one. If the troops can get by, we can land them below, and land on a road leading to the fort, or go up Bayou Pierre, which leads to Port Hudson Railroad. As you know your own plan, I won’t pretend to offer any suggestions... I merely give you the information I have obtained.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The Great Civil War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 265.

<sup>56</sup> *ORN*, XXIV, p. 550-552.

<sup>57</sup> *OR*, XXIV, Part III, p. 225-226.

This dispatch clearly indicates that Porter was very familiar with Grant's plan but felt comfortable to share suggestions. Grant took Porter's suggestion to skirt the Grand Gulf batteries, giving his troops an unopposed landing. In his after action report to Halleck, Grant writes,

On April 29<sup>th</sup> Admiral Porter attacked the fortifications at this place with seven iron-clads, commencing at 8a.m., and continued until 1:30 p.m., engaging them at very close quarters, many times not being more than 100 yards from the enemy's guns. During this time I have about 10,000 troops on board transports and in barges alongside, ready to land them and carry the place by storm the moment the batteries bearing on the river were silenced, so as to make the landing practicable. From the great elevation of the enemy's batteries had, it proved entirely impracticable to silence them from the river and when the gunboats were drawn off, I immediately decided upon landing my forces on the Louisiana shore and march them across the point below the Gulf. At night the gunboats made another vigorous attack and in the din the transports safely ran the blockade.

On the following day the whole of the force with me was transported to Bruinsburg, the first point of land below Grand Gulf from which the interior can be reached, and the march immediately commenced for Port Gibson.<sup>58</sup>

Once Grant and his force were landed on the eastside of the Mississippi logistics support would be critical. Porter's control of the Mississippi allowed him to provide support to Grant's army. Thus, ensuring they were equipped to continue pressing the attack against Pemberton's army. Although Grant would make use of the land to provide some of his supplies, ammunition was another story. He explained "It was necessary to have transportation for ammunition...I directed, therefore, immediately on landing that all vehicles and draft animals, whether horses, mules, or oxen, in the vicinity should be

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<sup>58</sup> *OR, XXIV, Part I*, p. 32.



collected and loaded to their capacity with ammunition.”<sup>59</sup> To protect his supply line Grant requested support from the navy, specifically,

Captain D.E. Owens, of the Navy..., was asked to place his flagship in the mouth of the Big Black to block that stream, and to leave another vessel at Grand Gulf to protect the stores and convoy any steamer that might require it. The remaining ironclads Grant wanted sent to Warrenton to prevent the Confederates crossing the river to break his delicate line back to Milken’s Bend and Young’s Point.<sup>60</sup>

Grant was able to use naval forces to effectively protect his supply lines.

Grant’s ability to gain this foothold was the key to the Union’s success in the Vicksburg campaign. The agility provided by the troop transports with force protection furnished by the gunboats created an increase in tempo for the Union forces. The Confederate defenders were unable to protect the entire river bank, allowing Grant to locate and exploit a seam in the enemy’s dispositions. The key intelligence Porter provided Grant enabled him to make a quick decision after the initial assault against Grand Gulf. When this is considered in conjunction with the simultaneous diversions, it is clear that this was a joint operation, which included, maneuver, fires, logistics, command and control, force protection and intelligence.

### **Communications in Joint Operations**

Communication is another key element in successful joint operations. Since communications played a significant role in the failure of the first operation against

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<sup>59</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. 288.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *Grant Rises in the West*, p. 362.

Vicksburg, it is important to discuss how the army and navy communicated during the campaign.

The ability of commanders to communicate, prior to, and during a joint operation is essential for success. Smooth communications improve the war fighter's vision of the battle space and enables him to gain valuable intelligence, thus facilitating prudent and timely decisions. This, in turn, increases the tempo of the fight. By controlling the tempo, the commander can maneuver his forces to the critical point, allowing him to strike a decisive blow. Communication also is key to effective coordination of forces. This is why communications were important during the operations at Vicksburg and continues to be important for today's war fighter.

### **Methods of Communicating**

At Vicksburg, Grant's army and Porter's navy communicated through several different methods, including signal flags and lights, telegraph, signal flares and gunfire, and dispatches sent via small boat. Their communications helped coordinate movements, direct fire support, pass logistical requests, pass intelligence, and exchange ideas, giving the Union an edge in the campaign. Additionally, the use of counter signals helped the Union Navy maintain control of the Mississippi. This system allowed the identification of friend or foe, making it difficult for the Confederates to use the river to re-supply their forces. Later, during the siege phase of operations, Union pickets along the river's edge used countersigns, as demonstrated by the following dispatch from General F.J. Herron, "CAPTAIN: Enclosed you will find countersigns for the coming week for the use of your

patrol boats next to my line of river pickets.”<sup>61</sup> This ensured a measure of security and mobility for both the Union soldiers and sailors controlling the river.

### **Leveraging Innovation**

Communications between the army and navy became more effective because of an earlier Civil War battle at Port Royal Ferry, South Carolina. During this battle, the navy provided precision fire for the army as they moved against Confederate positions. This was possible because Major Albert J. Myer developed a system of signals, which greatly increased the rapidity with which Union forces could pass information. Captain Rodgers, the commanding officer of the gunboat *Ottawa*, reported the following to his operational commander, Flag Officer S.F. Dupont.

Sir, \*\*\* Lieutenant Cogswell, a signal officer of the Army, was directed to report to me for duty, and furnished me with the means of constantly communicating with General Stevens with a facility and rapidity unknown to the naval service. I take this opportunity of recommending that the code of signals invented by Major Myers be at once introduced into the Navy.<sup>62</sup>

The high success achieved with Myer’s system of signaling prompted the Secretary of the Navy to address a letter to the Secretary of War on 19 February 1862, requesting the following, “It is the wish of this Department (Navy) that the system of signals now in use in the Army of the United States be adopted in the Navy, and that instructions in their use be made part of the regular course of instruction for the senior

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<sup>61</sup> *ORN*, XXV, p. 98.

<sup>62</sup> *OR*, VI, p. 65.

class of acting midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy.”<sup>63</sup> As a result of this request, the U.S. Navy taught this new system of signaling to Midshipmen reporting to the fleet. This system was employed to great effect at both Port Hudson and Vicksburg, enabling mutual support in the areas of logistics, fire support, coordination, intelligence and reconnaissance.

Signals could be sent day or night by use of flags, torches or lights. A signalman carried all necessary equipment, allowing for a degree of mobility. Three items were included in the signaling gear:

...the kit, the canteen, and the haversack. The canvas kit contained the flags, staffs, torches, a torch case, a wormer used to extract the wick if it became lodged inside the torch. These were rolled together and bound by straps. The copper canteen carried one half gallon of turpentine or other flammable fluid to fuel the torches. The haversack housed the wicking, matches, pliers, shears, a funnel, two flame shades, and a wind shade.<sup>64</sup>

Myer’s signal system used a series of numbers to represent each letter of the alphabet. The signalman would wave the signal flag, attached to a staff, to the left to equal “1”, to the right to equal “2”, and moving the flag straight down to the ground to equal three.<sup>65</sup> Over time, a type of shorthand was developed to make the method of signaling even faster. With clear weather and a clear line of sight, troops could signal over distances up to 15 miles. The Union developed a cipher to make the communications secure.<sup>66</sup> However, the system was not foolproof, as demonstrated by

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<sup>63</sup> OR, Series 3, II, p. 757.

<sup>64</sup> Rebecca Robins Raines, *Getting the Message Through: A Branch History of the U.S. Army Signal Corps*, (Washington, D.C., Center of Military History: 1996), p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Raines, *Getting the Message Through*, p. 6-7.

<sup>66</sup> Raines, *Getting the Message Through*, p. 16.

the fact that several Union signals were intercepted by the “Interceptions Service” of the “Confederate Signal Corps.”<sup>67</sup>

The ability to communicate helped the army and navy to operate more effectively. The following message sent by Commander Selin E. Woodworth of the *U.S.S. Sterling Price* shows the degree to which Grant and Porter’s subordinates were cooperating.

After engaging the battery for an hour, was informed by signal that General Herron was not ready with his battery of 42-pounders. Price and Mound City returned to their former stations leaving the Benton at anchor in her new position, where she now lies, and have been firing at short intervals at the battery all day. I have requested General Herron to notify us by signal when he is ready tomorrow morning and the Price and Mound City will go up and renew the attack. General Herron signalized this evening that he was out of ammunition for his 32 pounders, and requested a fresh supply. I notified him that we could furnish him with 200 rounds from the gunboats here for immediate use until we could obtain more from the other side. Please send 500 rounds, assorted fuses, by first wagons, as he will have a transport here for it tomorrow.<sup>68</sup>

This message along with many others demonstrates the coordination made possible by the use of signals.

Effective communications between the Union forces was not always easy or without challenges. One problem, for example, was the shortage of qualified signalmen to support the navy. On June 17 1863, Lieutenant Commander Greer, commanding *U.S.S. Benton* reported to Admiral Porter the following, “Last evening signals were made from our forces, apparently to this vessel. Having no one on board who understands the

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<sup>67</sup> Lt Col. Max L. Marshall, USA (ret), *The Story of the U.S. Army Signal Corps* (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc, 1965), p. 68.

system, I could not read them.”<sup>69</sup> Porter replied with the following message the next day, “I will send you a signal officer in order that you may be able to communicate with the army at all times, night or day. You will please so inform the army forces opposite you.”<sup>70</sup> This exchange highlights the fact that Porter was committed to keeping the communications link open with the army.

Although the Union devised a communications network, many times intra-force communications were carried out via hand delivered letter. Porter’s report to Welles, indicates this when he states,

I dispatched the *De Kalb*, Lieutenant Commander Walker; *Choctaw*, Lieutenant Commander Ramsay; *Linden*, *Romeo*, *Petrel*, and *Forrest Rose*, all under the command of Lieutenant Commander Breese, up the Yazoo, to open communication in that way with Generals Grant and Sherman. This I succeeded in doing, and in three hours received letters from Generals Grant, Sherman, and Steele, informing me of their vast successes and asking me to send up provisions, which was done at once.<sup>71</sup>

Although this was the least effective way to communicate, it still proved useful in coordinating support to sustain the forces.

The communications network was built over time and proved to be very effective. Shortly after Grant crossed the Mississippi, he established communications with his forces on the westside of the river. Captain O.H. Howard, a signal officer reported, “When General Grant reached Grand Gulf, a line was opened in ten minutes to Hard

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<sup>68</sup> *ORN*, XXV, p. 100.

<sup>69</sup> *ORN*, XXV, p. 74.

<sup>70</sup> *ORN*, XXV, p. 77.

<sup>71</sup> *ORN*, XXV, p. 5.

Times Landing, affording the General a means of communication between those points during his stay. This line was in constant use.”<sup>72</sup> Situational awareness and tactical decision making is enhanced through good communication networks.

As the campaign continued, the network became more complex and cultivated closer cooperation between the army and navy. Captain L.M. Rose another signal officer at Vicksburg reported to his headquarters the following,

“The line from General Grant’s headquarters to Young’s Point, La., is of the utmost importance; it is the means of communication between the army and the navy. Admiral Porter is highly pleased with the corps. The line from General Grant’s headquarters to the Yazoo Landing, the depot of supplies for the use of the medical, commissary, quartermaster’s, and ordnance departments. Is, of course, of much utility.”<sup>73</sup>

This network of communications was beneficial to both the army and navy commanders. Even though Union forces were operating on exterior lines, the system of communications used ensured minimal impact to the joint operations.

Major General A.W. Greely, who would later head the U.S. Signal Corps, provided an excellent overview of the Union communications service during the campaign. He stated,

The system around Vicksburg was such as to keep Grant fully informed of the efforts of the Confederates to disturb his communications in the rear, and also ensured the fullest cooperation between the Mississippi flotilla and his army. Judicious in praise, Grant’s commendation to his signal officer speaks best for the service. Messages were constantly exchanged with the fleet, the final one of the siege being flagged as follows on the morning of July 4<sup>th</sup>: ‘4.30 1863. Admiral Porter: The enemy has accepted in the main my terms

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<sup>72</sup> *OR, XXIV, Part I*, p. 134.

<sup>73</sup> *OR, XXIV, Part I*, p. 131.

of capitulation and will surrender the city, works and garrison at 10...U.S. Grant, Major - General, Commanding.’<sup>74</sup>

In closing, it is apparent that the communications were not perfect during this campaign, however, they were sufficient to give the Union leadership flexibility in its operations. Good communications allowed them to out maneuver the enemy, to provide logistical support, to share intelligence and to coordinate fire support. These are key capabilities for any joint force, just as applicable for us today as they were for Grant and Porter during their campaign against Vicksburg.

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<sup>74</sup> Major General Adolphus W. Greely, *The Signal Corps*, URL: [www.cwssignalcorp.com/signalcorps.html](http://www.cwssignalcorp.com/signalcorps.html). Accessed 7 January 2001.



## Chapter 4

### CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE LEADERS

Although the joint operations conducted at Vicksburg do not look like those of today, the key defining principles were clearly present. Sound leadership allowed Grant and Sherman to work together with navy leaders including Porter and Foote. This was especially impressive considering the separate chains of command involved. Senior officers in both forces put aside individual disagreements and branch competition that threatened to undermine their joint efforts. Grant's work with Foote to convince Halleck of the importance of a joint assault on Fort Henry is one example of how strong leadership can influence current and future operations. Likewise, Porter actively supported Grant and Sherman, as seen in the operations at Arkansas Post and the convoy support for Grant's troop transfer to Bruinsburg, which gave Grant the crucial foothold on the east bank of the Mississippi.

The nature of the frequent meetings of and correspondence between the top leaders highlights the cooperative spirit they established. This *esprit de corps* trickled down to subordinate commanders and made an impact at the tactical level. Grant provided troops to Porter to support his gunboats while Porter sent guns and gun crews to support Grant's artillery. These actions are a clear signal of their commitment to mutual support. Thus, it is no coincidence that Grant dedicated his Memoirs to the American soldier and sailor.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, p. v.

Communications established between the fleet and the army helped Grant and Porter coordinate their efforts and maintain the operational picture. It also played a key role in keeping the forces balanced and fit to fight. Naval forces provided cover for the ammunition and troop transports that traveled between Hard Times Landing and Grand Gulf. Through their communications, Grant and Porter exchanged valuable intelligence that allowed them and their subordinates to make good tactical decisions.

The Union forces also created synergy on several occasions. At Arkansas Post, their carefully synchronized assault overwhelmed the Confederate forces. The diversions launched by Sherman and Grierson at the same time Grant pressed his main force south of Vicksburg created multiple problems for Pemberton.

The balance achieved by the forces involved in the operation was crucial. Grant's army supported the gunboat fleet by supplying personnel to help man the gunboats. The navy supported Grant and his forces by supplying guns and gun crews to bolster the siege. Porter helped by providing key provisions to Grant's army, ensuring they had the beans and bullets necessary to press their offensive actions.

Union control of the Mississippi allowed its forces to be more agile than the Confederates. This ability to maneuver and increase the tempo of his operations was the key factor behind Grant's ability to conduct his amphibious assault against Bruinsburg. He was able to strike the seam in the Confederate line and out maneuver the Confederate forces.

Here, then, is ample evidence that the Union victory at Vicksburg was a direct result of joint operations. Grant and Porter understood the necessity of working together to achieve their goal and overcame significant obstacles to ensure their success. Prior to

the Vicksburg campaign, specific battles helped the idea of conducting joint operations evolve among both the army and navy leaders. Grant, in particular, saw numerous advantages in coordinated attacks against the enemy. The navy's fire support and its control of the Mississippi enhanced the army's mobility. Good communications and synchronized movements between the land and sea forces created both balance and synergy.

### **Lessons for Today's War fighter**

The principles inherent in successful joint operations are as applicable today as they were in 1863. The mutual support provided and the personal relationships developed by Union leaders played a key role in their success at Vicksburg. The value of strong leadership and its ability to overcome friction on the battlefield is still important today. The good judgment, spirit of cooperation and mutual trust and respect exhibited by key senior leadership of both the Union Army and Navy are great examples for future leaders to study and imitate.

The Union forces' ability to coordinate fires, maneuver, command and control, provide force protection and support intelligence and logistics efforts allowed them to attack the Confederate forces at their weakest point. Good communications allowed the commanders to exchange ideas, pass key intelligence and keep the operational picture. These are the same principles that we use to plan joint operations today. The main differences are the advantage of advanced technology and the increased administrative burden inherent in today's operations.

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